



## THE MIRACULOUS DARKNESS

The season of Lent is largely about the cross of Calvary. It is about our Saviour's innocent suffering and death for the sins of the world. It is about the blood shed for you and me. It is about the heavenly Father's offer of forgiveness of sins and salvation from sin, death, and hell. It is about God's call to repentance and to turn from our sins to the Saviour, Jesus Christ, in saving faith.

But as we turn to the Gospel accounts of our Saviour's death on Calvary's cross, we find other things that can rightly draw our attention. Take, for example, the darkness from noon to 3 p.m. on that first Good Friday. Then, at the moment of our Saviour's death, the huge curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom. There was an earthquake, the splitting of rocks, graves were opened, and some of God's people were raised to life. All these were miraculous events that only God Himself could do.

Let's direct our attention to the miraculous darkness.

Think of what preceded the darkness. Jesus was nailed to the cross at about 9 a.m. From then till noon, there was a lot of activity. The soldiers had divided His garments and cast lots for His robe. Jesus had prayed that the heavenly Father would forgive those who had crucified Him. Jesus had heard the criminal's cry for mercy and assured him that he would be with Him in paradise on that very day. Jesus had also placed His mother, Mary, into the care of His disciple John. The chief priests and others were busy criticising Pilate's inscription that said Jesus was the King of the Jews, and scoffers were busy directing insults at Jesus.

And then noon arrived. Matthew writes, "*At noon darkness came over the whole land and lasted until three in the afternoon*" (27:45). Luke added in his Gospel that "*the sun stopped shining*" (23:45). From what we read, we receive the impression that this darkness brought a halt to all the activity; that silence fell over the crowd.

Then Jesus cried out: "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*" (Matthew 27:46).

And again: "*It is finished*" (John 19:30).

And again: "*Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit*" (Luke 23:46).

Then as quickly as the darkness came at noon, so quickly did the light appear at 3 o'clock that afternoon.

This miracle is recorded in the annals of both Christian and heathen writings. Even early heathen opponents of Christianity acknowledged this miracle. Tertullian, a second-century Church Father, boldly wrote the

following words to his adversaries: "*At the moment of Christ's death, the light departed from the sun, and the land was darkened at noonday, which wonder is related in your own annals and is preserved in your own archives to this day*" (See "Apologeticum," book 1, chapter 21).

The best the heathen could do to explain this darkness was to speak of an eclipse. The early Christians did not explain it. They simply proclaimed it.

Now, this darkness proclaims a message. Indeed, one message of this darkness has to do with the identity of Jesus. During His life, Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. Deity was ascribed to Him while His opponents asked Him to "*show them a sign from heaven*" (Matthew 16:1). Well, they got their sign. Even the Roman centurion and those with him proclaimed, "*Truly this was the Son of God*" (Matthew 27:54).

Another message proclaimed by this darkness was God's judgment directed toward the spiritual darkness that had led up to Jesus' crucifixion. Read the Passion narrative, and you will find a combination of jealousy, unbelief, error, hypocrisy, sham, and hatred. It was as if God, through this miraculous darkness, was, so to speak, "rubbing their noses in it."

But this judgment was not only directed toward those who were directly responsible. This judgment was directed toward the whole world. Think of it: the world was covered by darkness. God was speaking a word of judgment against the spiritual darkness of this world - against this world's sin, unbelief, error, hypocrisy, sham, hatred, and the like.

Jesus said before that first Good Friday, "*Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out. I, if I am lifted up from the earth, shall also draw all people to Myself*" (John 12:31-32).

The darkness was also a word of judgment spoken against God's own Son, Jesus Christ, as He hung on the cross. For He willingly assumed unto Himself the sins of the world. He was hanging there in our place. Jesus cried out, "*It is finished*" (John 19:30). Then He died. God's judgment upon the sins of the world had been carried out.

Then, at 3 o'clock, the sun began to shine again. Like Easter, the light and the resurrection indicate that the price for sin, which had been paid by the Father's Son, Jesus Christ, on Calvary's cross, had been accepted in full. A message of forgiveness, salvation, hope, peace, joy, and light follows.

Once again, we stand on the brink of a season designed to prepare us to remember and receive the great work God did for our salvation. As we prepare, let us rejoice at

what God has done in and through Jesus, the Saviour long foretold, who leads the believer out of spiritual darkness into God's light.

### THE LORD'S SUPPER IS THE GOSPEL

The past is gone and cannot be recovered, no matter how many mental sleight-of-hand tricks we use to manipulate our imaginations. Human beings are creatures confined, often uncomfortably, to the present tense. Yesterday is irretrievable, and tomorrow doesn't exist yet. This is especially important for Christians to recognise and accept.

Jesus died some two thousand years ago, a twenty-minute walk from downtown Jerusalem. He was nailed upon a cross. He was abandoned and forsaken by God. He died at Golgotha. Blood and water poured out of His pierced side. Those are all historical facts. It happened. Jesus, the Lamb of God, actually bled and died for "the sin of the world." But the question must be asked in the present tense, "So what?"

So what that He died? So what that He rose three days later from death? So what that He ascended into heaven where He's "seated at the right hand of God the Father" and will return to judge both the living and the dead? How does any of that help us now? We can't climb into a time machine.

We can't scale a ladder up into heaven. How are we, who are prisoners of the present tense, supposed to get to Jesus so we can enjoy forgiveness, life, and eternal salvation that comes only through His shed blood and death?

The good news is that we don't have to go back to Golgotha or try to find the geographic location of God's right hand. In fact, we don't have to go anywhere, in time or space, to receive all the benefits of Jesus' Good Friday work for our salvation. He locates Himself for us in a specific place at a particular time. We often call that "church" or "worship" or "the divine service." He comes to us to gift us His body and His blood for the forgiveness of all sin, life, and eternal salvation. All we do is receive it.

For all of us who are time-bound, who cannot go backwards or up or forward, God's Word pours Himself into our mouths in the present tense. He is the tangible Gospel. Jesus' body and blood are a concrete statement that God is most certainly present for us. He is specifically for us with His body and His blood dishing out the forgiveness of all our sins. He pours Himself into our mouths to breathe new life into us and deliver the hope of eternal salvation in the eating and drinking.

Jesus' body and blood poured into our mouths is God's sure and certain promise that not only is the individual Christian the target of our Father's *for you* good news, but every Christian is also a member of Christ's body. We're in Christ, not on the outside looking in at the communion of saints.

We are bodied and bloodied into a comfort and hope that surpasses all human understanding. The God of the universe, who cannot be confined by one billion times one billion universes, says to us, "Don't worry that I am everywhere, I shall be somewhere *for you*. I shall be in and with the bread and the wine *for you*." How? Why? Because Jesus, God's Word in the flesh, says so: "*This is my body... This is my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sin... Do this...*" There's no more certain, present tense, *for you* Good News than that!

This is especially important for a Christian who doubts whether God's Gospel message is for him. Not so when it is poured into his mouth, gushes down his throat, and burns in his belly. At that moment, there can be no more certain assurance that he is the object of God's limitless love in Christ Jesus.

We don't have to go back to Golgotha to receive Jesus' salvific work for us. We don't have to imagine ourselves standing under the shadow of the cross, drenched by the sin-covering blood flowing from Jesus' side. There is no ladder that will let us sneak into heaven through God's bathroom window.

Instead, Jesus comes to us to serve us at His table. He speaks to us there, and with His speaking, He makes the Gospel tangible for us. It is a concrete certainty in the present tense. That's because the *for you*-ness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is always present tense. It is always a flood of grace gushing from the altar to a Christian's mouth and up to eternal life.

Jesus says, "*This is My body given for you... This is My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins... Do this...*" There He is! All of Him! Nothing of Himself held back! He gives Himself to us in that one little word: *is*. Jesus is for us in the present tense. And just in case we missed it, he adds two more words, *for you*, to give us forgiveness, life, and eternal salvation.

### WHAT IS TRUTH?

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said that the most profound thing in the New Testament was Pilate's question, "*What is truth?*" (John 18:38). Nietzsche may have read the New Testament, but he neither knew or believed its truth.

People today are very sceptical. Many ask Pilate's question: What is truth? They doubt and deny that we

can know the truth. This doubt is a sort of desperate faith, a conviction that they cannot be convinced of truth. People want to justify their ignorance, their unbelief, their errors, and themselves by the hopeless hope that there is no truth, or at least no knowing the truth.

What good is a question by itself? "What is truth?" is asking, not answering. These are not even the best words we have from Pilate. Much better is the one statement we know he wrote and his firm defence of that statement.

Pilate wrote the truth when he had affixed above the dying Saviour's head a placard proclaiming: "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (John 19:19). Pilate may not have meant it correctly. But that statement is true. In fact, it is Gospel truth.

"Jesus" means "Saviour" (Matthew 1:21). In fulfilment of prophecy, He was rejected by men and despised as a Nazarene (Matthew 2:23; John 1:46). He is David's Son as well as God's Son, the rightful King of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 1:1, John 1:49). He is the King who sacrificed Himself for His people. He will reign forever over the true Jews, all people who believe in Him and the forgiveness, life, and salvation He won for us by His suffering and dying for our sins in our place (Romans 2:28-29; Philippians 3:3).

The Jewish leaders objected to the words Pilate had written. Perhaps Pilate was tired of being pushed around. He insisted, "*What I have written I have written*" (John 19:22). Even a human ruler must, at times, insist on sticking with his words. We do not respect any man who does not stand by his word. How much more should we expect God, who cannot err and never changes, to stick with His Word?!

Putting it in writing makes it even more binding. A man is more careful about what comes from his pen than about what comes from his mouth. Spoken words can be lost in the air. Written words stay put. That is the purpose of writing them down. Pilate was weak and pliable. But even he stood by what he had written. God is strong and immovable. There is no doubt that He will stand by what He has written.

What God has written; God has written. God stands by His written Word. Jesus said, "*The Scripture cannot be broken*" (John 10:35). What God has written stands forever true. His Word will never pass away (Matthew 24:35).

God's Word is Law and Gospel. The Law tells us about our sins and God's anger. But the Gospel tells us about our Saviour and God's grace, the forgiveness of our sins because of Christ's suffering and death in our place. The

main message of God's Book is the Gospel, the good news. God arranged to have even Pilate write it and post it. Jesus died for all our sins.

What is truth? It is written!

### THE COMFORT OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION

In these days, unfortunately we find many teachers and professors in various seminaries treating the doctrine of the resurrection as nothing more than mere inconsequential trivia.

As a matter of fact, the resurrection of the dead is a most fundamental doctrine of our Christian faith (Acts 10:40; 3:15) and is universal to all mankind. Those who are lost will arise to eternal damnation (John 5:29; Matt. 25:41), and those who die in faith will arise with a beautiful spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44) like unto Christ's glorified body (Phil. 3:21; Luke 24:39; 1 Cor. 15:51-52). Indeed, if we are going to believe only that which we can understand, then resurrection from the dead will appear impossible. But herein, Christ also has the answer: "*You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God*" (Matt. 22:29).

Jesus did say of Himself, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies*" (John 11:25). He even predicted His own resurrection (Matt. 12:40); and it was announced by the angels (Matt. 28:6; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6), and prophesied by David (Ps. 16:10; Cf. Acts 2:27).

The resurrection of the body was not only the crowning demonstration of the truth and divinity of Christ's mission here on earth but it was amply proven throughout the Old Testament (so often quoted by Christ).

Subsequently to Christ's resurrection, His disciples ate with Him, touched Him, and were thus fully convinced that their Lord and Saviour had arisen from the dead. Furthermore, they were convinced, indeed, that His body was the identical body that had previously died on the cross and had been buried in the tomb. If Christ had not risen, then His suffering and death would not have been sufficient to atone for our sins and reconcile us with God.

So, as we celebrate Easter, let us do so in faith, a faith that admits the foregoing to be true, word for word, though beyond reason and argument.

**QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT BILL UNDERMINES  
BIRTH RECORDS, PARENTAL RIGHTS AND WOMEN'S  
SAFETY**

On the last State Parliamentary sitting day of last year, *The Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Bill 2022* was introduced by the Queensland Attorney General, Shannon Fentiman. Public submissions to this Bill closed on 11 January, allowing the minimum of exposure.

What is this Bill? This Bill will legalise the falsification of Birth Certificates by allowing any person over the age of 16 to alter their record of sex. It is dangerous and irresponsible legislation.

It appears the Government is confused between the contemporary social application of "gender identity" (which claims gender is fluid and subjective), and "sex" which is immutable and defined by biology.

The Government's policy and direction on gender and sex-related legislation have rightly been questioned by the Queensland Law Society, which has called for "an audit of all state legislation and policies referring to sex or gender, to clarify rules," according to *The Australian* newspaper.

The consequences of falsifying the facts surrounding the live birth of a person are far-reaching and have serious consequences. Two glaring consequences are parental rights and women's safety.

1. Parental rights: Any person under the age of 18 years old in Queensland is considered a minor according to Section 17 of the Law Reform Act 1995. Yet this new Bill allows children over 16 to apply to alter their record of sex without the consent of a parent or legal guardian, and children as young as 12 to "apply to alter the record of sex of the child if the child has obtained an order from the Children's Court." This is a serious breach of parental rights.

2. Women's safety: The Bill provides the opportunity for sexual predators to change their sex by simply filling in a form to legally falsify their sex and gain access to female-only spaces. This includes public toilets, change rooms, women's shelters, and women's prisons.

What will be the outcome of such a Bill?

**FROM THE PASTOR**

We shall soon be entering the time of Easter in the church calendar, where we are invited to hear the story of Jesus' sacrificial death and glorious resurrection once again. Jesus' resurrection proves that our salvation has been completed and that our hope for eternal life with God is secure.

As we enter this period, beginning on Ash Wednesday, mid-week services will again be held across the Downs.

For those who cannot attend, services bulletins will be available online mid-week, and printed copies will be available the following Sunday.

Patrick Hensel is well into his studies and has two subjects going at the moment. He continues to take Greek through an online course offered through *Zondervan Academic* and meets with Pastor Tim Killion from Walther Seminary via Zoom for face-to-face classes. Patrick's other class is with me, working through a basic knowledge of Christian doctrine, after which he will begin to study *Francis Pieper's Christian Dogmatics*. This three-volume set sets forth the doctrines of Christianity as taught in the Lutheran Church. Walther Seminary has sent me the syllabus for this class, and we hope to begin in March. Other courses will start throughout the year, depending on the recommendation of Walther Seminary and our own Seminary Committee.

A couple of months ago, in my monthly Zoom calls with the ULMA, I was told how another pastor and congregation from Austin, Texas, was looking at joining the ULMA. Pastor Paul Harris and the congregation of Trinity Lutheran Church ([www.trinityaustin.com](http://www.trinityaustin.com)) have begun discussions with the ULMA. In these discussions, he has been made aware of ULMA's fellowship with the AELC and our Statement of Faith. I am familiar with Pastor Harris and have known of his presence for some time. He is a former pastor of the LCMS. After reading a book he wrote a few years back entitled *Why is Feminism so Hard to Resist* (my copy is available to borrow if anyone would like to read it), I was glad to meet and talk to him this past month. We found nothing to disagree upon. It seems as though the ULMA will be voting to accept Pastor Harris and Trinity Austin into their fellowship. I shall keep you all posted.

Bible studies are set to resume in the congregations below the range, but since the congregations on the Downs will be holding mid-week Lenten services, I shall resume Bible studies there after Easter. Please keep an eye on your bulletins for times etc. and make the effort to attend. These studies will also become available under the Members section of the website as I prepare them.

God bless you all!

Pastor

**LATEST AELC WEBSITE STATISTICS**

The number of average daily visitors for the month of January 2023 was 14020. The busiest days continue to be Sundays and Tuesdays.